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## Sacagawea

*(c. 1790-1812 or 1884)*

A near-legendary figure in the history of the American West for her indispensable role on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Sacagawea has become an enigma for historians seeking to trace her later life.

The daughter of a Shoshone chief, Sacagawea was kidnapped by the Hidatsa when she was about ten years old and taken back to their village on the upper Missouri. There, she and another captive girl were purchased and wed by Toussaint Charbonneau, a French Canadian trapper.



When [Lewis](#) and [Clark](#) engaged Charbonneau as an interpreter for their expedition in 1804, it was with the understanding that Sacagawea would also accompany them. Aside from her value as an interpreter, they expected her mere presence to speak well of them to Indians they would encounter along the way. As Clark noted in his journal, "a woman with a party of men is a token of peace."

Eight weeks before Lewis and Clark set out from the upper Missouri, a second token of peace was added to the expedition when Sacagawea gave birth to her first child, a son named Jean Baptiste Charbonneau but called Pomp or Pompey by Clark. Sacagawea carried her infant on a cradleboard as the "Corps of Discovery" headed upriver in April, 1805.

Four months later, when the expedition had reached the navigable limits of the Missouri, Lewis set out to make contact with a Shoshone band, from whom he hoped to obtain horses for their trek across the mountains. When Sacagawea arrived to serve as interpreter, she found the band was led by her older brother, Cameahwait, who had become chief on their father's death. Deeply moved by this reunion, Sacagawea might have taken advantage of such an astounding coincidence to return to her people, but instead she helped the explorers secure the horses they needed and journeyed on with them and her husband to the Pacific.

On the return journey, Sacagawea and Charbonneau parted with Lewis and Clark at a Hidatsa village on the upper Missouri, and from this point the historical record of their lives becomes somewhat conjectural.

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[Narcissa and](#)  
[Marcus](#)  
[Woodruff,](#)  
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[Wovoka](#)  
[Young,](#)  
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Charbonneau evidently traveled to St. Louis at the invitation of William Clark, who had grown fond of the young Pompey and hoped he could induce his father to settle there. After a brief trial, however, Charbonneau returned to trapping, leaving his son in Clark's care. He worked for the American Fur Company, and later accompanied Prince Maximillian on the expedition that brought the artist Karl Bodmer to the upper Missouri in 1833.

Whether Sacagawea accompanied Charbonneau to St. Louis is uncertain. Some evidence indicates that she did make this journey, then returned to the upper Missouri with her husband where she died in an epidemic of "putrid fever" late in 1812. Other accounts say that Sacagawea ultimately rejoined the Shoshone on their Wind River reservation and died there in 1884.

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